

O 201825Z FEB 09
FM AMCONSUL BELFAST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1451
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
NSC WASHINGTON DC
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELFAST 000009

NOFORN

DEPT FOR EUR/WE; NSC FOR SHERWOOD-RANDALL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [UK](#) [EI](#)

SUBJECT: ENSURING THE PEACE IN NORHTERN IRELAND: KEY USG OBJECTIVES

REF: A) BELFAST 005; B) LONDON 356; C) BELFAST 006; D) 08 BELFAST 080

CLASSIFIED BY: Susan Elliott, Consul General, Belfast.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C/NF) Summary. This is a joint message from Embassies Dublin, London, and Consulate Belfast. It outlines key objectives for continuing USG involvement in Northern Ireland in order to ensure the completion of the successful peace process that began with the Good Friday Agreement. Finalizing the transfer of policing and justice powers from the British government to Northern Ireland's devolved administration is the last remaining political component of the peace process and, therefore, continues to be the USG's main policy objective. The parties in Northern Ireland are engaged in finding acceptable mechanisms to deal with the legacy of the past (victims and reconciliation issues). Encouraging economic development and foreign direct investment in Northern Ireland should strengthen the current peaceful political stability. We believe a Special Envoy would lend great assistance to the people of Northern Ireland as the political process there matures, as communities engage in constructive forward-looking reconciliation efforts, and as Northern Ireland strives for economic growth. This focus would help cement the peace process. The traditional White House St Patrick's Day can help achieve these objectives. End Summary.

Current State of Play

12. (SBU) Northern Ireland's devolved government, as envisioned in the provisions of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, fell apart in 2002 because the IRA had not decommissioned its weapons. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which now is the largest unionist party, contributed to the 2002 fall of the devolved government because it had not agreed to the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. In 2005 Sinn Fein persuaded the IRA to decommission its weapons, the first step toward formation of the current power sharing arrangement. In October 2006, with the support of the U.S., Irish and British governments, agreements among all the parties were achieved at St. Andrews, Scotland. In January 2007, Sinn Fein endorsed devolution of policing and justice and recognized the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) for the first time. The parties then agreed to hold elections and form a new power sharing government. After winning pluralities in the March 2007 elections, DUP Ian Paisley Sr. took office as First Minister and Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness became Deputy First Minister on May 7, 2007. When Ian Paisley decided to retire, the DUP named Peter Robinson as their party leader and he assumed the position of First Minister.

13. (SBU) In May 2007, the British government devolved all powers to Northern Ireland's government, except the administration of policing and justice. Progress on implementing this final step stalled primarily because of DUP concerns about former IRA members having responsibility for security-related issues. Another concern for all Northern Ireland's politicians is the high cost of managing the courts,

prison and police services.

Key U.S. Objectives for Northern Ireland

¶4. (C/NF) Consulate Belfast and Embassies Dublin and London agree USG objectives during the year ahead should focus on encouraging Northern Ireland's leaders to move forward politically on the devolution of policing and justice, make lasting decisions on how to address and move beyond the legacy of the Troubles (victims and reconciliation issues), and promote economic growth. We agree that the U.S. should continue to deploy a Special Envoy to demonstrate high-level U.S. interest in these issues and advance our objectives. The British and Irish governments are actively urging us to appoint a new Special Envoy. A Special Envoy would enable our missions to focus on these objectives and other aspects of our bilateral relationships with the UK and Ireland, while recognizing that working these issues solely from London or Dublin would not be as effective at this time.

Devolution of Policing and Justice

¶5. (C/NF) The October 2006 St. Andrews Agreement spelled out that the Northern Ireland Administration was not ready to assume the powers of policing and justice, but that there should be significant progress by May 2008 towards this final component of devolution to a power-sharing government. Sinn Fein subsequently became disillusioned because it felt that the DUP was not taking the necessary steps toward devolution of police and justice. However, in November 2008, the DUP and Sinn Fein agreed to complete the legislative steps necessary for devolution of policing and justice to take place in 2009. The delay in devolution has created a vacuum which dissident republican groups have used to criticize Sinn Fein's leadership. The British government and the PSNI are concerned that this vacuum could lead to violence against police officers and other government targets.

¶6. (C/NF) The USG has been clear in its support for devolution and the need for all parties to carry out their commitments under the St. Andrews Agreement. The British and Irish governments will seek a commitment from the new U.S. administration of its continued support on this issue.

¶7. (C/NF) Key outstanding issues which could hold up progress are: securing adequate financing for policing and justice from the British government, selection of the Justice Minister (as a compromise both DUP and Sinn Fein have agreed that neither party should lead the ministry), and passage of implementing legislation by Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The USG could capitalize on its good bilateral relationships with the British and Irish governments to facilitate the resolution of these issues.

Legacy of Past

¶8. (C/NF) The Consultative Group on the Past, lead by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, issued a report in late January 2009 (Ref C), recommending the creation of a Legacy of the Past Commission to work with victims of the Troubles and the establishment of a highly controversial compensation scheme. Both the British and Irish governments are carefully examining the Eames and Bradley report. The Irish hope that the U.S. will play a strong role in the Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland envisaged in the Eames-Bradley Report and expect that the USG and private citizens in the U.S. will be approached for funding for the Commission. During meetings with U.S. representatives, Eames and Bradley have mentioned the high cost of implementing the Report's recommendations and need for USG funding (Ref C).

¶9. (C/NF) A key aspect of the Eames and Bradley report deals with how to handle investigations into past cases. The report recommends the formation of a Legacy Commission, chaired by an international commissioner. The Commission would have a five-year mandate to complete investigations of historic murder

cases as well as assist with reconciliation efforts. This Commission would have a mandate to investigate all unresolved cases such as the 1989 murder of Human Rights Attorney Pat Finucane. Thus far, the USG has not taken a strong position on the recommendations of the Bradley and Eames Report, nor have we addressed more broadly the usefulness of addressing the legacy of the Troubles. The issues raised by official and unofficial examinations of the events in Northern Ireland during the Troubles are morally, legally, and politically complex. These issues, however, need to be addressed in a forward leaning, constructive manner.

Economic Development

¶10. (C/NF) Decades of conflict had a negative impact on Northern Ireland's economy. In the past year, the Special Envoy and the U.S. Ambassadors in Dublin and London have served as liaisons with Irish America and U.S. businesses to promote investment in Northern Ireland. This paid dividends in May 2008, when over 80 U.S. companies attended the U.S.-Northern Ireland Investment Conference (Ref D). With British government funding constrained by the economic downturn in the UK, Prime Minister Brown supports foreign investment in Northern Ireland as a way of creating jobs and stimulating economic growth, providing proof of the value of the peace process. The Irish government promotes all-island investment and an all-island approach on economic issues such as tourism, energy, and infrastructure links. With the global economic downturn impacting worldwide investment, USG support for economic development will continue to be vital to Northern Ireland and the buoyancy of the peace process.

Importance of St Patrick's Day

¶11. (C/NF) The traditional St. Patrick's Day celebration at the White House, which was started by President Clinton and continued during the Bush Administration, can help the USG achieve its objectives in Northern Ireland. Embassies London and Dublin and Consulate Belfast believe a White House St. Patrick's Day celebration this year would provide concrete evidence of continued USG interest and engagement in the political, economic and societal issues of the North -- engagement that all the parties in Northern Ireland, and both the Irish and UK governments, still believe is very important in maintaining the momentum of the peace process. London, Dublin and Belfast agree that the key elements of a White House St. Patrick's celebration should be the President's bilateral meeting with the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and a meet and greet with Irish and Northern Ireland political, business and community leaders. The event should highlight USG key objectives in Northern Ireland -- devolution of policing, cross community reconciliation, and the need for economic development.

View from London

¶12. (C/NF) The calculus governing the Northern Ireland devolution issue in London has changed markedly over the last 18 months. While the issue is still seen as important, PM Gordon Brown has not invested a fraction of the political or personal capital that former PM Tony Blair devoted to the issue; and given the press of other issues demanding Brown's attention this is unlikely to change in the near term. Illustrative of the HMG's current focus on the issue was a comment made to the Political Counselor by the Cabinet Office director for the U.S. (NSC director-equivalent) who said he spends roughly 15 percent of his time on Northern Ireland, whereas his predecessor devoted half of his time to the issue. That said, HMG has underscored to us the need to name a new U.S. Special Envoy to keep positive momentum on Northern Ireland moving forward at least through 2012 -- the sunset clause date by which the system for devolution of policing and justice must be reviewed.

¶13. (C/NF) Also affecting the British government's approach to Northern Ireland will be its lack of ready cash. The global economic downturn has tightened HMG's purse strings

dramatically, and Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward has told us that the government will not be in a position to provide any further incentives on outstanding devolution issues, as party leaders in Northern Ireland have requested. The days of using injections of HMG funding to bridge political gaps have drawn to a close, and the HMG will likely shift its emphasis to put responsibility for funding further progress on the private sector. In explaining its inability to inject further cash to fund devolution, the government will doubtless point to the UK's bleak economic situation but will also likely ask those corporations who stand to gain much financially from a peaceful and stable Northern Ireland to begin footing the bill for future prosperity. (Comment: Given the progress on devolution and the HMG presumed policy shift from aid to trade in Northern Ireland, perhaps it is time move past direct funding in favor of encouraging increased international investment. The International Fund for Ireland, since its inception in 1986, has funded over 5,700 projects across the island of Ireland at a cost of over GBP 576 million in donations from the U.S., Canada, the EU, Australia, and New Zealand. End comment.)

View from Dublin

¶14. (C/NF) The Irish government believes the USG will continue to be a critical neutral international observer -- and, if needed, mediator -- in the Northern Ireland peace process. Irish government officials think sustained U.S. involvement will encourage greater political cooperation between republicans and unionists (especially Sinn Fein and the DUP), and will help to maintain community confidence in the institutions of government in the North. They are specifically concerned that the timetable for the devolution of policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly could break down, once again creating a flashpoint that the USG could help defuse. In addition, they think that USG involvement will help the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Irish government, and the British government deal effectively and peacefully with the volatile issues of unreconstructed republican dissidents and as yet still armed unionist paramilitaries. Moreover, they think that continued, sustained U.S. focus on Northern Ireland will compel the British government to ensure that its focus does not waver.

¶15. (SBU) The Irish government recognizes the need to bolster the economy in Northern Ireland and seeks American investment to help accomplish this. The government is promoting an all-island approach on economic issues to the extent that it is politically feasible (tourism, energy, infrastructure links, etc.). The renewable energy sector holds great promise for North-South cooperation and investment, and is an area in which the USG could add value. Embassy Dublin recommends the USG also consider focusing on the work that is being done by InterTradeIreland, which promotes all-island business links. Another good first step would be to create a higher-profile for the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership by, for example, looking to expand the range of projects that it can support and encouraging another senior USG official to take on the role of co-chairman of the body. (The most recent U.S. co-chair was former HHS Deputy Secretary Tevi Troy.)

ELLIOTT